

FAQ's about Professional Supervision for QB Pastoral Leaders

As we approach the QB special assembly on the 13th September to consider the matter of professional supervision, it has become apparent that there are still some questions being asked about the proposal. Attached are some key questions being asked and the respective answers. A much more extensive set of FAQ's were circulated previously and can be accessed on our website by clicking [here](#).

Why is professional supervision being proposed at this time?

The proposal to consider professional supervision for our pastors has emerged as a response to many factors. The wellbeing of our pastors has always been a primary matter of concern for our Movement, and we are constantly seeking to better equip, support and resource our pastors. As the registering body for our pastors, QB has a duty of care to our pastors and to our member churches to ensure we do all we can to support the wellbeing of our pastors. It has been evident for many years that while the current mentoring of pastors provides some good support, it is limited in its scope and effectiveness. We have seen this brought to light during the last couple of years as an increasing number of pastors have struggled with the demands and weight of ministry and life despite the support of mentors. At the same time, we have seen over the last couple of decades the emergence and development of other supports for pastors such as coaching and professional supervision.

The 2017 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse highlighted that denominations can and must do better in their support of pastors and provided an impetus for us and many other denominations to consider what our training, screening and ongoing support mechanisms should involve. It also demonstrated to us the increasing scrutiny and higher expectations that the government, insurers and indeed general society has for our churches and pastoral leaders. This is evidenced by an ever-increasing compliance load that is faced by churches and pastoral leaders alike.

What authority does QB have to make this recommendation?

Historically, the members of QB through its assembly have delegated the credentialing of pastors to the association. When the current Ministerial Services Committee was established in 2001, it was given the authority for "operational decisions relating to candidating matters and the accreditation and ordination of ministers." The Triennial review of which this decision was a part noted that "Changes to accreditation and ordination policy remain the province of the Assembly. Proposals to change policy should be canvassed through local forums." Accordingly, this is the process that has been followed and Ministerial Services are proposing this policy change for consideration by the assembly as per the assembly's directions.

What is Professional Supervision?

Professional Supervision may be defined as "a relationship between two or more disciples who meet to consider the ministry of one or more of them in an intentional and disciplined way. Such an arrangement allows each person being supervised to give an account of their work, to explore their responses, review their aims and develop their strategies and skills." (Leach & Patterson 2015)

At its core is the opportunity to reflect critically with a trained supervisor on one's work. It enables a pastor to unpack the challenges, dilemmas, disappointments and achievements in their work and put them back together in ways that will help them grow in their own self-awareness of who they are and how they act and react. It also gives opportunity for a pastor to learn and therefore grow in competence in regards their ministry practice, in theological understanding of their circumstances and God's influence as well as in their Christian faith, commitment and practice. A further benefit of good supervision is that a supervisor will help a Pastor to consider their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of those they minister to as well as to identify any potential for their wellbeing to be compromised.

Professional Supervision has some things in common with mentoring, coaching or even spiritual direction, but has some unique differences. These similarities and differences have been unpacked previously through FAQ's and webinars.

Will I be forced to have a non-Christian, secular professional supervisor?

No. Every pastor will be free to choose their own professional supervisor.

QB will continue to produce a list of recommended professional supervisors who are committed Christians and familiar with Baptist polity and governance. The majority of the supervisors already on our list are Registered QB pastors who have themselves been mentors for pastors under our previous requirements.

Is professional supervision a secular therapy that will introduce non-Christian influences into the lives of our pastors?

No. The professional supervisors we recommend for pastors are trained with tools that assist them to ask probing questions to help a pastor reflect on their situation from a biblical and pastoral perspective. They approach the task with a pastoral heart and are trained to ensure that all aspects of relational or other challenges are examined including questioning where a Pastor maybe close to or at risk of stepping over an ethical or moral line. Good probing questions are indeed biblical as is the practice of reflection. But the true work of examination and analysis is done by the Pastor as they sit under biblical authority and the personal ministry of the Holy Spirit. The supervisor's role is to create the space whereby the Pastor can sit in a safe environment to honestly self-evaluate their ministry.

What authority will a professional supervisor have over a pastor?

None. A professional supervisor does not have any direct authority over a pastor and cannot require a pastor to do anything. Neither does a professional supervisor have any authority over or line of communication into a pastor's church leadership team and so cannot have any indirect influence through them. The role of a professional supervisor is to support a pastor through facilitation self-reflection in order to help that pastor identify the best path forward in their individual situation. In some instances, this may involve repentance and/or an increased self-awareness and/or intentional planning and committed action. It is the pastor who identifies, decides and commits to these actions. While a professional supervisor may at times offer resources, advice or recommendations, pastors being supervised are free to do what they want with these offerings.

Who will a professional supervisor report to?

Professional supervision is a confidential relationship between the supervisor and pastor being supervised. In normal circumstances, the details of matters discussed will not be divulged to anyone.

Very occasionally, when a supervisor determines that there is immediate potential for harm to either the pastor being supervised or another person to whom they are ministering, there may be a need for a supervisor to raise these concerns with others. Mandatory reporting around the abuse of children would fall into this category. The first response of the supervisor would always be to discuss matters of concern with the pastor in supervision and seek to elicit a change in behaviour or attitude. If corrective measures were willingly put in place, in most cases, this would be the issue dealt with and no reporting would be undertaken. But if there was unwillingness to correct the behaviour, and the risk of harm continued, the duty of care of a supervisor would require that they report their concerns to the organisation(s) responsible for the pastor – that is to QB and/or the local church. In such situations, existing policies and procedures for dealing with matters of concern (e.g. Code of Conduct and Ethical Investigation Response Group Procedures) would be followed.

A supervisee and the professional supervisor will also confirm the number of sessions conducted (not the content of the sessions) annually to QB.

Why can't a local church leadership supervise their own pastors?

Local church leaders are key supports for local pastors and will continue to be so. However, the work of the professional supervisor is most effective when the supervisor is independent and outside the system in which the pastor ministers. Pastors need a safe space to honestly and freely explore all relationships and ministry challenges – including any issues that may exist with local church leadership, other pastors or influential congregational members. Professional supervisors are trained and equipped to do this work unlike most church

leaders or other pastors. Professional supervisors do not replace local church leaders or peer networks, but complement the support given by local church leaders.

What are other denominations doing?

Most other denominations around Australia are well advanced in the development of policies and the implementation of professional supervision for their ministers and clergy. All other state Baptist Associations are also at various stages of introducing professional supervision for their registered pastors in accordance with the Australian Baptist Ministries supervision framework.

Why is QB linking professional supervision to the registration of pastors?

Historically, the members of QB through its assembly have decided that the association should manage the accreditation of pastors to ensure consistency and that the agreed standards of accreditation are met. From time to time the assembly has been asked to decide what the expectations are for a pastor to be credentialed and to maintain their credentials. This list currently includes

- minimum standards for theological qualifications and vocational calling,
- a minimum doctrinal statement,
- a defined application, screening and development process
- the requirement to have ongoing professional development,
- compliance with specific child safety requirements,
- the requirement to operate within acceptable policies and codes of conduct
- having regular support relations in place (e.g. a mentor).

All these things are mandatory items for Pastors seeking registration and at any point if a pastor were to refuse to comply with the minimum standards agreed to by the assembly, their registration would be in jeopardy.

This proposal seeks to modify an existing requirement of registration - the requirement for all pastors to regularly access external pastoral support which at the moment is in the form of mentoring. The belief that external support of pastors is an essential part of their wellbeing and development as previously recognised by the assembly has not changed and so it is appropriate for it to continue to be linked to registration.

Why can't professional supervision to be optional?

All our QB registered pastors are required to meet minimum requirements to be registered and to maintain their registration. The requirement to have ongoing development and support is one of these standards that the assembly believes is of fundamental importance to the wellbeing of pastors and the effectiveness of their ministry.

Professional supervision is unique among various supports being accessed by pastors as the Supervisor is trained and equipped to provide reflective support for pastors and to intentionally focus on boundary issues and examine aspects of ministry in the light of ethics and codes of conduct. This is something that has up until this point been missing from the support structure required by our pastors through mentoring, but which we believe is becoming increasingly important and necessary in the complex world of pastoral ministry. Filling this gap is one reason why professional supervision has been proposed for our pastors as the mandatory support moving forward.

Another reason is that those in most need of reflection on emotional or ethical issues are sometimes the ones who are least aware of it or most resistant to it. Making professional supervision essential (but not too onerous – 4 sessions per year) means that we can be confident that those most in need will receive the support they require.

What about autonomy of the local church and freedom of conscience?

As Baptists, we hold the autonomy of the local church in high esteem. Under the Lordship of Christ, we hold that local churches have the responsibility of discerning His will for their local fellowships. But since no one local church can fulfil the great commission, we also encourage churches to work together in voluntary association (the QB Movement). Such collaboration helps us together to maintain doctrinal fidelity and standards of holiness, achieve common ministries (e.g., the supporting of missionaries, theological education), and faithfully stewardship common funds. When agreeing to associate, the local church voluntarily decides to abide by the

doctrinal and practical standards, policies and procedures of the association, as agreed to by the assembly of the association. One such example of this is the accreditation of pastors where local churches choose to require their pastors to submit to the accreditation requirements stipulated for them by the assembly of churches. If pastors are not willing or unable to meet these requirements, then their registration will not be granted or will lapse.

Freedom of conscience has also been an important Baptist conviction which helped the first Baptists to stand against persecution from secular authorities who were seeking to dictate matters of salvation and how one could worship. The argument of early Baptists was that jurisdiction is key. Secular authorities should be concerned with matters of civil life. Matters of salvation and worship, however, were God's domain in which he instructed his children primarily through Scripture and secondly through their consciences. Religious freedom should be afforded to all it was argued. This was a reaction against control exerted by the state church. The early Baptists always couched this as freedom of a group to decide how to worship rather than freedom of an individual to decide what is right for them individually. The later risks being more akin to our postmodern experience where everyone decides for themselves which is right.

In regards professional supervision, the assembly of churches will be seeking to discern what is appropriate for our pastors. It is not something being imposed by the state. In terms of jurisdiction, this issue relates to the registration of pastors which is within the jurisdiction of the assembly to decide. It is not an overreach. This issue does not relate to our salvation, nor does it seek to control how, when or where we can worship our Lord – the issues our forefathers stood up against. Regardless of the decision, individuals will retain freedom of conscience and will continue to be free to choose whether this expression of church is right and true for them.

Why are we acting on a recommendation instead of waiting for it to become law?

We recognise that governments have been established by God (Rom 13:1) for our good. All levels of government commonly seek to bring about change by highlighting issues and encouraging self-regulation of responsible parties as a first step. It is only when they perceive non-action or inadequate action that they resort to a legislative approach. This has been our experience with the bulk of the child safety risk management initiatives (few of which are actually legislated but are now mandatory for QB churches). For example, consider the National Redress Scheme. Organisations have been encouraged to act on their own initiative, but because some organisations are refusing to stand up and take responsibility for the harm caused, the federal government is currently drafting legislation to withdraw their charitable status. This is the normal pattern we observe.

While there is not currently a legal requirement for us to implement professional supervision, we believe there is a clear expectation to act by the government and the community, and we believe that as per the recommendation, professional supervision will be a blessing and help to our pastors.

What are the implications of not implementing this proposal?

If this proposal is rejected by the assembly, QB will miss the opportunity to proactively support the wellbeing of our pastors in a complex and challenging ministry environment. If pastors are not processing issues, maintaining health, dealing well with ethical challenges, our churches will ultimately suffer. Also Queensland Baptist (as the registering body) and local churches (as the employers) will be exposed to increased risk and reputational damage if they are seen to do nothing to support their pastors with these issues.

For example, our insurer in recent years has significantly tightened requirements for churches seeking Molestation Insurance cover by requiring evidence that key recommendations of the Royal Commission have been implemented. To secure insurance it is likely that organisations will be expected to show further compliance with other recommendations such as the implementation of professional supervision as this becomes the norm across Christian denominations in Australia.

Legally, the exposure to litigation will also increase if churches or our denomination fails to implement what has been recommended and is now widely acknowledged as best practice for supporting pastors.

It is expected that QB will be called to begin reporting on the progress of their actions and implementation plan to the National Office of Child Safety in the next couple of years, joining many denominations and charities which

are already reporting annually on their progress. This will allow both the government and public alike to clearly identify areas of action by QB churches. A perception that QB churches are not taking their responsibilities seriously will damage our denominational reputation and the reputation of our churches.

Will professional supervision really make any difference?

Evidence suggests that while professional supervision is not a silver bullet, it does and will bring benefits to the support and wellbeing of pastors. The findings of the research conducted by the United Methodists in UK in 2018 and then again in 2019-20 show clearly that supervision was effective in achieving the outcomes of supporting pastors in the restorative, formative and normative dimensions of care. The Anglican church in South East Queensland documented that similar benefits were experienced by the ministers that participated in their 2019 pilot study.

Like any support of this nature, the benefit is dependent upon the willingness of both the pastor and supervisor to enter into a relationship and fully enter into the process. Many Baptist pastors who have already sought out professional supervision testify to the worth and benefit of these sessions to their ministry and personal lives.

What happens with my mentor if Professional Supervision is introduced?

The proposal is to change

From the Current registration requirement: meeting with your mentor six times a year to seeing;

To the Proposed registration requirement: meeting with a professional supervisor four times a year and meeting with another support person (of your choice) for an additional four times a year.

Under the proposal, each pastor is given freedom to choose who their additional support person based on their perceived needs. This additional support person may be their old mentor or a new mentor, it may be more professional supervision, it may be a coach, it may be a counsellor, it may be a spiritual director, it may be some other specific type of support relevant to your ministry that is approved through the registration process.

Some mentors may be asked to continue in mentoring relationships. Other mentors may finish their relationships.

Why couldn't QB upskill my mentor to do this work?

As a registering denomination, QB believes it is best if we maintain some independence from the process of training and accrediting Professional Supervisors. While we could train all our mentors to be professional supervisors, this would not be an effective use of resources since most mentors spend only a small amount of time in such relationships and would have limited opportunity to hone their skills as supervisors.

There are already multiple theological training institutions who resourced and equipped to train professional supervisors and the number of institutions offering training options is increasing to meet the current and ongoing demand for professional supervisors. We currently refer QB pastors who are interested in being trained as professional supervisors to these training institutions for training. Most of these, when trained, invest a significant amount of their time supervising pastors and thus quickly add valuable experience and competence to their qualifications.

When will this change be implemented?

The timing of any change depends on the decision of the assembly.

If the assembly vote to adopt the proposal on the 13th September, then we will begin to work on

- building a list of recommended supervisors for QB Pastors through an application and screening process
- developing the induction that all recommended supervisors will be required to complete.

- developing further training courses for pastors to help them get the most out of supervision.

We have pastoral registrations coming due on 1st March and 1st September each year and we would seek to have these things in place ready for the cohort of pastors coming up for re-registration on the 1st of March 2023. From this time, pastors would be required to adopt the new proposal when ever their re-registration next falls due, however, they can choose to transfer across to the requirements earlier if they wish.

Many other questions about the nature of supervision, the benefits of supervision, the role of a supervisor and about the supervisory practice can be found in the set of FAQ's that were circulated previously and can be accessed on our website by clicking [here](#).